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Editorial

As we strive for excellence in our daily lives, the more obsessed we get with success in education, or in our careers, or even in pastimes such as sports, we focus on our goals and often do without other facilities such as food in order to concentrate. In the same way, for religious people, the actual goal of their daily lives is to get closer to their Creator and to gain spiritual excellence, and abstinence from food and water enhances that experience.

In the history of religious experience, fasting has often been a vehicle for spiritual enlightenment. In November this year, millions of Muslims around the world will be fasting from sunrise to sunset, and concentrating on spiritual activities such as prayer and contemplation, charity and doing good deeds for their fellow men. To the inexperienced eye, fasting seems like a tortuous activity; for onlookers, the thought of missing out on coffee or lunch can seem

difficult, yet for the person observing the fast, it feels much easier. The lack of food or water diverts the mind towards the real meaning of existence and the One who created food and water. And Fast is not meant to be a torture, as those that are too young or unwell are not meant to fast.

Islam is not unique in using fasting as a means for self-purification (spiritual as well as physical). Christians of the past had observed a fast during lent in the lead up to Easter. Some Christian monks would even fast continuously for forty days and nights in their zealous pursuit. It was only in recent centuries that the fast has been relaxed to the modern form of abstinence from certain foods such as meat, chocolate or eggs for 40 days. It is from this recent form of fasting that Christian traditions such as Pancake Day have developed – pancakes are made with all the remaining eggs on the last day before Lent.

Similarly, many of the major festival days of the Jews involve some form of fasting or abstinence. The most notable is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement on which Jews confess and repent for their sins. On this day, they focus on prayer and forgiveness from their Creator, while at the same time abstaining from food, water and even bathing. They have other fast days such as Asarah be-Tevet.

Many Hindus fast on specified days every month in order to purify themselves. Their day begins with ritual bathing and prayer, and then they endure 24 hours abstinence from food, but are allowed to drink. The devotees of Durga have 9 nights in which they fast. Buddhists debate the significance of fasting, but many of them do have seasons or days of fasting such as Sojong Day in Tibet.

So as we have seen, fasting is observed by religious people of various faiths around the globe to achieve spiritual and physical

purification. Islam is perhaps the only religion to have a common period of fasting observed by the great majority of its adherents. But people of most faiths are aware of the spiritual benefits that it brings.

May God enable Muslims to benefit spiritually during the month of Ramadan. Ameen.

Fazal Ahmad – UK

NOTE:

In this journal, for the information of non-Muslim readers, '(sa)' or 'sa' after the words, 'Holy Prophet', or the name 'Muhammad', are used. They stand for 'Salallahu alaihi wassalam' meaning 'Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him'. Likewise, the letters '(as)' or 'as' after the name of all other prophets is an abbreviation meaning 'Peace be upon him' derived from 'Alaih salato wassalam' for the respect a Muslim reader utters. Also ru or (ru) for *Rahemallahu Ta'ala* means the Mercy of Allah the Exalted be upon him

Special Feature

The following is an address by Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih V, delivered on Saturday 11th October 2003 at the reception on the opening of the Baitul Futuh Mosque, in Morden, London, one of Europe's largest Mosques.

After affirmation of the unity of God and Muhammad^(sa) being a messenger from Allah, seeking refuge from Satan and beginning in the name of Allah, Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad said:

I just want to say a few brief words. Firstly, thank you to all our honourable guests who accepted our invitation and came here this evening to attend the opening of the Baitul Futuh Mosque. Thank you also for your kind best wishes.

Islam teaches us to always be mindful towards God Who is our Creator and to always keep His memory fresh in our hearts and to deal with His creation with love, affection, harmony and tolerance.

This is the sum total of the teaching given to us by Muhammad the Holy Prophet of Islam^(sa). So, if this is the teaching of this religion, how can slogans of hatred be shouted from the rooftops of its mosques that are supposed to be the places of worship for its followers? A true Muslim can never raise his voice in hatred against his fellow citizens, nor for that matter against the ruling authority or government of the time.

It is the responsibility of a true Muslim that he should remain loyal and fully abide by the laws of the land of which he is a subject.

The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah^(as) states:

‘A true Muslim who is aware of the teachings of his faith, will always remain sincere and obedient to the government under whose benign shadow he lives his life in peace. Religious difference does not prevent him from true obedience and compliance.’

(Tohfa Qaisariya p.29)

This is the beautiful teaching of Islam which the Ahmadiyya community practises. Those who have known us or have been in touch with us certainly know that this is true. They can confirm that, as a community, Ahmadi Muslims have always stayed away from all evil acts and crimes or anything in breach of any law or which causes any harm or loss to God’s creation.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community is always ready to serve humanity. In connection with this objective, we have been serving humanity, irrespective of religious difference, through hospitals and schools in the poor countries of Africa.

The Founder of the Ahmadiyya community had accepted a pledge from those who joined his community that if they believed that God Almighty had sent him so that he should show them again the true image of Islam, and introduce again its beautiful teachings, then they would also have to accept, for the sake of God Almighty, that they would, to the best of their abilities and resources, behave graciously and kindly towards God’s creation. They would have to serve the creation of God. When a person meets another person in this spirit, it results only in love and affection and peace. There is no trace of hatred.

As I said earlier, man has been created for only two purposes and they are that man should worship the One and Only God and to inter-act kindly with God’s creation. To achieve these objectives, mosques are built. In view of this objective, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community is pressed into the erection of mosques in all corners of the world and just as with those

mosques, this mosque of the Ahmadiyya community, is a symbol of peace.

I also urge you, that irrespective of your faith, creed, race or nationality, you should create in your own areas, an atmosphere of peace and help the suffering mankind. If we fail to act, there appears to be nothing to arrest the destruction towards which mankind is rapidly heading. This destruction would be far worse than the destruction caused by the Second World War.

Remember, that man cannot know another man till he begins to recognise his God, and, in order to recognise God, you have to pay greater attention to worshipping Him. This seems to be a difficult task in this age, but we will have to turn to Him for our own survival.

I close by quoting you an excerpt from the writings of the Founder of the community. He says:

‘The mission for which I have been appointed is to remove

that growing gap in the relationship between God and His creation and replace it once again with the relationship of love and sincerity; and by allowing the truth to manifest itself, cause religious wars and discord to end and thus lay the foundations for peace; and disclose such religious truths as had become hidden from the eyes of the world; and display an example of that spirituality that had become buried under the darkness of the pleasures of the self; and by my condition rather than by word of mouth, I should tell and explain God’s powers that enter man and re-emerge as meditation or prayer’
(*Lecture Lahore*, p.47)

Allah help us in understanding our responsibilities, Amen.

Coming soon in *The Review of Religions* is a series of articles on various mosques around the world. The series will start with an introduction about the significance of a mosque and will include information and photos of the Baitul Futuh Mosque where the above historic address was made.

The Path to Righteousness

Presented below is a compilation of extracts that have been taken from the discourses and speeches of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) of Qadian, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi, as recorded in the collection entitled *Malfoozat*.

Malfoozat is the title of the ten volumes that contain the collection of discourses, speeches and addresses of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) of Qadian, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi.

Translated by Amatul Hadi Ahmad



The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as).

In 1891, he claimed, on the basis of Divine revelation, that he was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi whose advent had been foretold by Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) and by the scriptures of other faiths.

His claim constitutes the basis of the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

[Translator's Note: All references to the verses of the Holy Qur'an are given in Arabic as they occur in the text. The English translation, presented in Italics, is taken from the translation of the Holy Qur'an by Hadhrat Maulvi Sher Ali Sahib^(ra). Where the Promised Messiah^(as) has himself stated a certain interpretation of an Arabic verse, this is incorporated in the main body of the text].

The reward of faith is the Garden of Paradise and, as streams of water are required to keep the garden green and luscious, such 'streams of flowing water' are the consequence of acts of goodness. The reality of this is that acts of goodness performed in this world will take on a

symbolic resemblance to the flowing streams of water in the next world. In this world, too, we witness that the more a person progresses in his acts of goodness and the more he safeguards himself against deeds that may be acts of disobedience to God Almighty, the more he abandons the practices that go outside the limits set by God the greater is his faith. Every new act of goodness brings him greater satisfaction and he attains a deeper inner strength. The knowledge of God begins to give him pleasure until such time as a believer is granted by God's grace, a state of love for God in which he becomes totally immersed. The light of God engulfs his heart completely and all types of darkness and hindrances are removed from his path. In this state, all difficulties and tribulations that are placed in the path towards God, do not worry the seeker for one moment. Instead, facing tribulation [in the path of God] becomes a source of pleasure for such people. This is the final stage of belief.

There are seven aspects of belief and an additional, final, one that is granted through the love and grace of God. This is why there are seven doors of paradise and the eighth one is opened only through the special Grace of God. It is worth remembering that heaven and hell that will be found in the next world will not be something entirely new. They are an image formed by a person's faith and his actions and this is its true philosophy. It will not be something that will be given to a person from the outside – it is something that emanates from within a human being. For the true believer there is a 'paradise' in this world for every situation that he may find himself in. The 'paradise' that exists for him in this world contains the promise of paradise in the next world. How clear this matter is that paradise lies within people's own beliefs and good deeds. The enjoyment of its pleasure begins in this very world. It is the same belief and righteous actions of this world that appear as gardens of paradise together with the

flowing streams of water.
(*Malfoozat*, Vol. 2, pp.386-388)

The best and satisfactory state for a human being is that in which the state of his deeds is clear and correct. His actions should vouch for this and the blessings of God and powerful and extraordinary signs should be with him and always support him. It is only then that he is with God and God is with him. Satan creates an opportunity for himself in everything to deceive and divert people [from the right path]. It is because I have repeatedly presented my own revelations that some people have had the idea that they too should do the same. This is a tribulation that has been imposed upon them and Satan helped them in this path of destruction. Consequently they began to receive satanic revelation and to hear voices from within themselves. People such as Chiragh Din, Ilahi Baksh, Faqir Mirza and many others met their destruction in this path and there are many others still who are treading the same path.

Members of my Community should move away from such things. On the Day of Judgement, God will not ask them how many dreams they had, rather, they will be questioned about righteous acts and as to how many good deeds they performed. Revelation is an act of God, it is not an act of man. To consider God's act to be the cause of pride and joy is the work of an ignorant person. Observe the [life of] the Holy Prophet^(sa) and see how he used to worship. At times he would stand up all night [in prayer] so that his feet would become swollen. When his wife enquired as to why he strove so hard when he had been purified of sin, he replied, 'Should I not become a grateful servant [of God]'.

A person should never give up hope. The onslaught of sins is a very severe thing and reform seems difficult but one should not despair. Some people say that we are sinners and we are overwhelmed by [the demands of] the self so how is it possible for us to become righteous. They

GOD HAS PLACED IN MAN A POWER THAT BURNS AWAY SIN AND THIS POWER IS THERE IN MAN'S NATURE. YOU WILL NOTE THAT NO MATTER HOW MUCH WATER IS HEATED – IT CAN BE HEATED SO MUCH THAT IT BURNS WHATEVER IT TOUCHES – BUT EVEN THEN IF THIS WATER IS Poured OVER FIRE, IT WILL QUELL THE FIRE. THIS IS BECAUSE GOD HAS PLACED THIS CHARACTERISTIC IN WATER THAT IF IT IS Poured OVER FIRE, FIRE IS EXTINGUISHED. LIKEWISE, NO MATTER HOW MUCH A PERSON IS IMMersed IN SINS, NO MATTER HOW MUCH HE IS DROWNING IN BAD DEEDS, EVEN THEN HE HAS THE CAPACITY TO PUT OUT THE FIRE OF SINS.

should consider that a believer is never without hope. He who despairs [and thinks that there is no hope] is none other than Satan himself. A believer should never be a coward. No matter how much a person is overwhelmed by his sins, God has placed such ability in man that he eventually does overcome sin. God has placed in man a power that burns away sin and this power is there in man's nature. You will note that no matter how much water is heated – it can be heated so much that it burns whatever it touches – but even then if this water is poured over fire, it will quell the fire. This is because God has placed this characteristic in water

that if it is poured over fire, fire is extinguished. Likewise, no matter how much a person is immersed in sins, no matter how much he is drowning in bad deeds, even then he has the capacity to put out the fire of sins. However, if this ability had not been given to man, he could not then have been held accountable for himself. What is more, in that case even the appearance of Prophets and Messengers would have been unnecessary. The reality is that the nature of man is pure [and provision has been made for its requirements]. If there is physical hunger and thirst, there is also food and water. A human

being needs air to breathe, so there is air. In short, if all that is required for the physical body is provided for, why should there not be provided the requirements of the soul? God Who is ever Merciful and ever Forgiving and who covers up the faults of his servants, has provided all the necessary provisions for the preservation of the soul. If a human being were to search for the spiritual water, he will find it. If he searches for the spiritual bread, it would be given to him. Just as there is a law of the physical world, so there is a law relating to the spiritual world but the condition is that one must seek. He who seeks shall find. He who strives to find God shall certainly meet the pleasure of God.

(*Malfoozat*, Vol. 10, pp.93-95)

Having taken the Oath of Allegiance, a person should not be content with the belief that this movement is based on the truth and that such a belief would bring blessings. The present time is one of tribulation and the plague is spreading all around.

God is not pleased with mere belief unless it is accompanied by good deeds. Now that you have entered the fold of this Community, you should try to be good and righteous. You should avoid all ills and should spend your time in prayer – supplicate [before God] day and night. Time of tribulation is also the time of God's anger and at such a time prayer, supplication, giving of alms and repentance should be the norm and your speech should be kind and gentle. Prayers should also be offered during Salat as the saying goes, 'he who pleads, does not die'. Mere belief does not serve man – the belief of a person who puts his belief to one side cannot benefit him. Subsequently, it is meaningless to complain that taking the pledge of Initiation has been of no benefit! God is not pleased with mere words.

In the Holy Qur'an, God has set righteous actions with belief. Righteous deeds are deeds that do not contain the slightest ill within them. However, remember that the good deeds of a

human being are attacked by ‘thieves’. What are these ‘thieves’? These include actions that are carried out for show as well as the feeling of pride at one’s good actions. There are also numerous other ill deeds and sins that a person often commits. All such behaviour falsify the good deeds. The righteous deed is that which contains no element of cruelty, ostentation, pride or the usurping of the rights of others. Just as good deeds safeguard one in the next world, so he is saved in this world through good deeds. In a household, if there is even one person who performs righteous deeds, the whole household is safeguarded. It should, therefore, be well understood that mere belief is of no avail until one steadfastly performs righteous deeds. When a physician writes a prescription, he intends that the patient would follow that prescription and take the prescribed medicine. Should the patient not make use of the medicine and put the prescription aside, what benefit can possibly accrue to him!

(*Malfoozat*, Vol. 4, pp.274-275)
Remember this well that unless deeds are done with a true and sincere intention and are accompanied by true spirituality, they can be of no benefit and will be of no avail. Deeds can only be referred to as righteous when there is no corruption in them of any kind. The opposite of rectitude is disorder. The pious person is he who is completely free from all forms of disorder and dissension. Salat that is in a state of disorder and is tainted with ulterior motives, is certainly not for God – it does not ‘reach’ up above the ground by as much as even a hand because such people are devoid of sincerity and spirituality.

There are many people who raise the objection, questioning the need for [the formation] of this Community when according to them they, too, offer Salat and keep fasts. In this way they deceive others and there is no doubt that some people who are unfamiliar with [our teachings and with our Community] may well be deceived and join others

in saying that we, too, offer our Salat and keep fasts and recite the various prayers, why then has this division been created? Remember that such talk is the result of ignorance and lack of recognition of God. [The creation of division] is not my doing – if there is division, it is God who has created this division because it is God who has established this Community. The reason for this is that the spiritual state has become so weakened that it has reached the point where the force of faith has completely disappeared. However, God wishes to give new life to true faith and this He has done through the new Community. Given these circumstances the objections of the people who question the formation of this Community are absurd and without any basis.

In short, remember this well that such doubts and suspicions should not enter one's heart and if one were to consider this matter fully, such thoughts should not even arise. It is when careful consideration is not given

to these matters that doubts and suspicions arise and some people who look only at the surface, raise the objection that there are other people who are also Muslims. Such doubts and suspicions can very quickly lead a person to his destruction.

I have seen letters that have been written by people who apparently belong to our Community but say that they are asked by others as to what the need is for a new Community when they too offer Salat, declare the same Kalima, and keep fasts? Such people further write in their letters that those who question them appear to be good people, doing good works. Despite the fact that the writers of such letters belong to our Community, upon hearing objections and doubts, they write that they do not know the answer [to such objections]. I feel regret and pity for such people that they have failed to understand our true purpose and intention. They only see that other people customarily adhere to the practice of Islam and in this trait they deem to fulfil their duty to God but their

practises lack the spirit of truth. Hence, such objections work like the suspicions created by acts of magic and [those influenced] do not care to think that our intention is to create a true faith that saves a person from the death of a sinful life. Such motives are not to be found in those who follow only the customs and traditions. Their sight is set only upon the apparent – it is not upon the reality. What they have is only the outer skin, not the inner kernel.

Remember and understand this point that at the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) had the Jews abandoned the Torah? Had they abandoned practising the Torah? Certainly not! The Jews even now believe in the Torah and their practise is according to this Book. Their sacrifices and other customs are still carried on today as they were at that time. They continue to face towards Bait-ul-Muqadis while performing their prayers. At the time of the Holy Prophet^(sa) there were also present great Jewish

scholars and Jewish priests, so what need was there for the Holy Prophet^(sa) and for the new Book of God [namely, the Holy Qur'an]? There also existed at that time the Christian people. Among them, too, was a sect that believed in the Unity of God. What then was the reason for the appointment by God of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) and for the Book of God? This is a question that should be carefully considered by our opponents and by those who raise such objections [against the formation of our Community]. This is a very subtle issue but those who ponder and consider matters carefully will be able to see that it is not such a difficult matter.

Remember that God looks only upon the soul and upon spirituality. God does not look at the apparent actions – He looks only at the reality and the inner state as to whether the actions are tainted by an element of selfishness and personal desires or whether there is sincerity and true obedience to God. The apparent form of deeds, however,

may deceive a person. He may be led to think highly of a person who is seen with a rosary in hand or if he observes a person to be offering voluntary prayers at night or mid-morning. Similarly, when he sees someone to be performing noble acts of virtue, he may believe him to be a saintly person but God does not like the show of ‘outer layer’ [of deeds]. God is never pleased with [acts that are only] an outer shell, an outer covering – God is not pleased until there is loyalty and true sincerity.

(*Malfoozat*, Vol. 6, pp.237-240)

Taqwa, that is, righteousness is no small thing. Through it one has to battle against all those ‘Satan’s’ that overwhelm a person’s inner strength and force. All these forces in the state of ‘Nafse Ammara’, that is, the self that incites to evil, are a Satan within man. If these forces are not controlled they will come to enslave a person. Knowledge and intelligence also become ‘Satan’s’ when used improperly. The task of the righteous person is to

develop these and all of his capacities correctly. Similarly, those who consider revenge, anger and marriage to be a bad thing in all circumstances, they too go against nature and they battle against the basis of human nature and human instinct.

The true religion is that which nurtures human capabilities and not one that degrades them. Anger and virility of man are aspects of human nature that have been placed there by God and, therefore, to abandon them such as becoming a hermit or a monk is to fight with God. All such matters that go against human nature usurp the rights of human beings. If matters were in fact as they try to depict them then it would be posing an objection against God who created and placed within us those capabilities.

(*Malfoozat*, Vol.1, pp.33-51)

Ramadan and the Essence of its Blessings

by the late Sheikh Mubarak Ahmad, ex-Missionary-in-Charge, Ahmadiyya Movement (U.K.) – This article was first published in the Muslim Herald in July 1979

For every spiritual exercise in Islam the ultimate aim is the attainment of God's pleasure through the regulation of one's life in accordance with His ordinances.

Of the five articles of faith of Islam, the fourth is fasting during the month of Ramadan. The Holy Qur'an states:

O ye who believe, fasting is prescribed for you during a fixed number of days, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may (safeguard yourselves against moral and spiritual ills and) become righteous. But whoso from among you should be ailing (not being permanently incapacitated), or should be on a journey, shall complete the reckoning by fasting on a corresponding number of other days; and for those who

find fasting a strain hard to bear is an expiation, the feeding of a poor person (if they can afford it). Whoso carries through a good work with eager obedience, it is the better for him. If you had knowledge you would realise that it is better for you that you should fast. The month of Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an began to be revealed, the Book which comprises guidance for mankind and clear proofs of guidance and divine Signs which discriminate between truth and falsehood. Therefore, he who witnesses this month, being stationary and in health, should fast through it. But whoso, is ailing (not being permanently incapacitated), or is on a journey, should complete the reckoning by fasting on a corresponding number of

other days. Allah desires ease for you and desires not hardship for you; He has granted you this facility so that you should encounter no hardship in completing the reckoning, and that you may exalt Allah for His having guided you and that you may be grateful to Him.

(Ch. 2:184-186)

Fasting is an old universal institution, practised since ancient times. A study of the Old Testament books, Exodus and Samuel shows that Moses^(as) and other Israelite Prophets, on whom be peace, observed the ritual of fasting on important occasions. So did Jesus^(as), as is said of him in Matt. 4:2-3:

‘And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, then he felt hungry’

Indeed, Jesus^(as) is reported to have told his disciples in Matt. 17, that evil spirits cannot be exorcised except through prayer and fasting. In Matt. 6 he appears to have gone to considerable

lengths to describe the manner in which fasting should be carried out. He says:

‘But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face. That you appear not to men to fast, but to your Father which is in secret: and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly.’

(*Matthew* 6:17-18)

In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, p.104 Vol. IX, Fasting is explained as follows:

‘Commonest by far, however, of all the uses of voluntary fasting, in the past and at the present time, is its practice as an act of self-denial with definite religious intention. By the greater number of religions, in the lower middle and higher cultures alike, fasting is largely prescribed, and where it is not required it is nevertheless practised to some extent by individuals in response to the prompting of nature.’

Objectives of Fasting

The Qur'anic verse quoted at the beginning, stipulates three objectives for fasting:

1. *'So that you may become righteous'*.

The very act of fasting to comply with the commandment of Allah, creates a sense of obedience to Him which leads man to conduct his life generally in accordance with His wishes, avoiding evil tendencies and doing good all round for the attainment of His pleasure. Thus is righteousness achieved.

2. *'That you may exalt Allah for His having guided you'*.

The prime object of man's creation is to exalt Allah and that is why during the month of Ramadan and during the Eid prayers following it considerable stress is laid on the recitation of Takbir.

3. *'That you may be grateful'*.

This is a necessary corollary to the attainment of the two preceding objectives.

Attributes of the month of Ramadan

The month of Ramadan carries many special attributes which have been described by no less an authority than the Holy Prophet^(sa) himself. Some of these are:

The Opener of paradise

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said that from the first night of the month of Ramadan, satanic forces are chained, rebellious elements are disciplined and the shutters of Hell are drawn without exception. All the Gates of Paradise are opened and a crier shouts: 'O the seeker of righteous deeds proceed, and O the recliner to evil intentions desist'. Many sinners are granted amnesty from Hell, and this occurs every night of the month'.

(Bukhari and Muslim).

Abstention from evil tendencies

Abu Huraira says that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: When Ramadan arrives the gates of paradise are opened and the gates of hell are locked up and satans are put in chains.

(Bukhari and Muslim).

Month of Munificent Charity

Ibn Abbas relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) was the most generous of men and he was at his most bountiful during Ramadan when Gabriel visited him every night and recited the Qur'an to him. During this period the bounty of the Holy Prophet^(sa) waxed faster than the rain-bearing breeze (*Bukhari* and *Muslim*).

Intercession from the Qur'an and the fast.

Abdallah bin Amar says that the Holy Prophet^(sa), said that the fasting and the Qur'an intercede with Allah on behalf of a servant. Fast shall say: O my Lord, I kept this man from food and other physical comforts throughout the day, so please God, condescend to my intercession on his behalf. And the Qur'an will plead: I kept him away from sleep at night, so please accept my recommendation for him. Both these intercessions would be carried.

Basic purpose of fasting

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa), said that if one did not eschew falsehood and false

conduct, Allah has no need that he should abstain from eating and drinking (*Bukhari*). In Arabic language, falsehood includes wrong deeds, illegal means, bribery, adulteration, etc.

Excellence of fasting over other exercises

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa), said: 'A man's good works carry multiple rewards, from ten times to seven hundred times. Allah says: A fast is an exception, for it is observed for My sake and I shall bestow the reward for it. He who observes a fast gives up his passion and his food for My sake. For such a one there are two joys: a joy when he breaks his fast and a joy when he meets his Lord. His breath is purer in the estimation of Allah than the fragrance of musk. The fast is a shield. When any of you is fasting he should eschew loose talk and noisy exchanges. Should anyone revile him or seek to pick a quarrel with him, he should respond: I am observing a fast'. (*Bukhari* and *Muslim*).

RAYYAN – chambers of Paradise
 Saad ibn Sahl relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa), said: There is a gate of paradise called Rayyan through which only those will enter on the Day of Judgment who are regular in observing the fast and no one else. A call will go forth: ‘Where are those who observed the fast regularly? and they will step forth and no one beside them will enter through that gate. After they have entered the gate will be closed and no one else will enter from it’.
 (Bukhari and Muslim).

The Holy Prophet’s^(sa) sermon on Ramadan

Salman the Farasi relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) delivered us a sermon on the last day of the month of Sha’aban and said: O people, a great month has dawned upon you, a month of blessings in which there is the Lailatul Qadr (Night of Decrees – said to be the night when the Holy Qur’an began to be revealed. It can occur on the odd-numbered nights between 21 and 29th) which is better than a thousand months. Fasting during the month is obligatory from God and nightly

prayers are voluntary. Anyone who partakes of a good deed in it is like the one who discharges an obligatory ritual in other months. Anyone who discharges an obligatory article in this month is like the one who discharges seventy of them in other months. This was a month of patience and patience has its reward in paradise. This was a month of reconciliation and a month in which a believer’s wealth was enhanced. Anyone who fed a fasting person at the time of his breaking fast will have his sins remitted, will be shielded from fire and will earn a reward equivalent to that earned by the person who fasted without the latter suffering any diminution.

We asked the Holy Prophet^(sa) that not everyone of us could afford to help feed a fasting person. The Holy Prophet^(sa) replied that this kind of reward would be available even if a little quantity of milk, yogurt or water was offered at the time of breaking the fast. Anyone who fed a satisfying meal to a fasting person would be offered drinks from my springs so that he

would never suffer any thirst to the day he enters paradise. The earlier part of the month was mercy, its middle remission from sins and the last portion was manumission from fire. Anyone who lightened the work of his servants in this month will have his sins forgiven by God and will find himself saved from fire.

Fasting-a peerless act

Abu Imamah relates that he asked the Holy Prophet^(sa) for advice which could be beneficial to him from God, and he replied that he should keep fasts for there was nothing quite like them.

Skipping fast without excuse

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said that anyone who did not fast on any of the days of Ramadan without lawful excuse or illness would never be able to ransom the loss even if he fasted for the rest of his life.

Hypocritical fasting

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: Many a fasting person had nothing except the suffering of thirst, and many a

person standing in nightly prayers had nothing but suffering sleeplessness – and no reward.

The above quotations from the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Holy Prophet^(sa), give a clear and concise indication of the true aims and objects of fastings and their beneficial status in the society of Islam.

Rules of Fasting

We now turn to the conditions attached to this important institution in Islam.

Beginning the month of Ramadan.

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: start the month after sighting the new moon and end it at the next sighting. If the vision is clouded then calculate at the end of the 30th day of the month of Sha'aban (*Muslim*).

Ibn Abbas relates that a man from the outskirts of the town came to the Holy Prophet^(sa) and reported that he had sighted the moon. The Holy Prophet^(sa) asked him whether he would state this on oath that there was no God but

Allah and that Muhammad was His Messenger. The man took the oath, whereupon the Holy Prophet^(sa) instructed Bilal to announce that people should start fasting the next morning.

Pre-dawn meals

Anas says: the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: serve yourselves with breakfast, for they are blessed. (*Bukhari and Muslim*). In Masnadi-Ahmad it is written that pre-dawn meals are blessed, therefore they should not be left out even though it may consist of a mouthful of water, for God and His angels shower blessings upon those who partake of pre-dawn meals.

Amr ibn Aas says: the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: the distinctive feature between our fasts and those of the people of the Book is the eating of breakfast (*Muslim*).

Anas says that Zaid bin Thabit told him that the Holy Prophet^(sa) took pre-dawn meals with them and then led the prayers. I asked, how long was the interval between the meals and the call for

prayers and he answered that it was the time required for the recital of fifty verses (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

Early breaking of fast

Sahl ibn Sa'ad relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: My people will adhere to good as long as they do not delay the breaking of the fast (*Bukhari and Muslim*). In another Hadith, Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said that Allah, the Lord of honour and glory proclaimed: Of My servants I love most those who are foremost in breaking their fasts (*Tirmidhi*).

In view of these sayings of the Holy Prophet^(sa) and of God Almighty, it is essential that a fast should be ended immediately after the sunset as there is no merit in prolonging it beyond this point.

Anticipation of Ramadan with one or two fasts

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: Do not observe the fast on two days preceding Ramadan, but this does not apply

to one who has made a practice of it (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

Eating or drinking by mistake

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: Should any of you eat or drink in forgetfulness of the fast, he should continue his fast till the end, for Allah has fed him and given him to drink. (*Bukhari and Muslim*).

Fasting procedure

A person must express his or her intention to fast in words such as: 'I hereby express my intention to keep the fast of tomorrow during the month of Ramadan.'

With what to end the Fast?

Salman ibn Aamir Dhahi relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: if any among you keeps a fast, he should end it with a date or else with water for it is pure (*Abu Daud and Tirmidhi*). Dates need no artificial preservative and have a high glucose content value which helps to revitalise the body rather quickly. They also have a fair proportion of iron in them.

Prayer at ending the Fast.

Maadh ibn Zahra says that he heard that whenever the Holy Prophe^(sa) used to end his fast, he used to pray: O our Lord, for Your sake I kept the fast and with Your food have I ended it. Ibn Umar said that the Holy Prophet^(sa) used to say at ending a fast: Thirst has disappeared and veins have received nourishment, and God willing, reward has been secured.

Feeding others in ending fast

Zaid ibn Khalid Julmi relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: He who provides for the breaking of the fast by another or equips a combatant in arms, will receive the same merit as the one who was observing the fast or engaging in Jihad without diminishing in any way the reward of the latter (*Tirmidhi*).

Exemption for pregnant and suckling women

Anas relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: indeed, God has exempted a pregnant or a suckling woman from fasting. (The fasts thus lost can be kept after the pregnancy. The same applies to a

sick person and women during their monthly periods).

Fast and travel

Ayesha says that Hamza bin Amr al Aslami who used to keep regular fasts told the Holy Prophet^(sa) that he fasted even when he was travelling. The Holy Prophet^(sa) replied it was up to him to keep or not to keep the fast (this in fact relates to voluntary fasts).

Jabir relates: Once the Holy Prophet^(sa) was on a journey and he saw a crowd around a person over whom a shade had been erected. He asked what was the matter, and the people replied that the man was fasting. The Holy Prophet^(sa) replied, it was no virtue to keep a fast while travelling. (The Holy Prophet^(sa) did sometime fast while travelling but this happened only when he was keeping voluntary fasts; otherwise, as far as the fasts during the month of Ramadan are concerned, it is the Qur'anic injunction not to fast while travelling but to make up the lost count on other days. However, if a traveller wishes to stay at a certain

place during his journeys for at least fifteen days or more, then he should keep the fasts).

Recompense for marital relations while fasting

Abu Huraira relates that once we were sitting with the Holy Prophet^(sa) when a man came and cried: O Messenger of Allah, I have indeed been doomed! The Holy Prophet^(sa) asked what the matter was and the man replied that he had consorted with his wife while he was fasting. The Holy Prophet^(sa) asked him whether he could afford to free a slave and he replied that he could not do so. He asked him whether he could fast continuously for two months and the man replied no. He asked him whether he could feed sixty poor and the man replied no. The Holy Prophet^(sa) asked him to sit down and wait. Shortly thereafter, a basket of dates was brought by someone to the Holy Prophet^(sa) whereupon he called for the person in question and asked him to feed those dates to the poor. The man said: By God, O Messenger of Allah, there is no house poorer than mine in

this valley. This made the Holy Prophet^(sa) laugh so that even his back teeth could be seen, and said: All right, go and feed them to your family.

On miscellaneous matters

Anas relates that someone came to the Holy Prophet^(sa) and said: I have an eye complaint. Is it possible to treat my eyes with antimony while I am fasting? The Holy Prophet^(sa) replied: yes, (this shows that usage of eye drops or similar treatment of eyes during fasting is permissible, provided the ailment or inflammation is not serious enough to bring the sufferer into the category of a sick person.)

Aamir ibn Rabia says that several times he saw the Holy Prophet^(sa), brush his teeth while he was fasting.

A companion of the Holy Prophet^(sa) says that he saw the Holy Prophet^(sa) at a place called Araj, drenching his head with water while he was fasting, because of thirst or heat.

Voluntary vomission, taking injection or enema treatment are infringements of fasts. If vomiting causes weakness, the fast can be ended. For intentional infringement of a fast during the month of Ramadan, it is not only necessary to keep another fast on another day but also to observe the penalty of keeping sixty successive fasts or to feed sixty poor people either in one place or separately or to feed one similar person for sixty days or to pay an equivalent sum of money.

Abu Huraira relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: if anyone hears the call to prayers while he is still in the process of drinking or eating the final portions, he should complete the process of eating or drinking.

The last ten days of the month of Ramadan

Having completed 20 days of fastings in the month of Ramadan, a believer feels a sense of achievement towards the attainment of God's pleasure and therefore wishes to complete the remaining ten days with greater

vigour and enthusiasm. It is reported that the Holy Prophet^(sa) kept awake for most of the night for prayers and exhorted his family to do the same during the last ten days of Ramadan. Ayesha further reported that every year till the time of his death, the Holy Prophet^(sa) used to go into retreat into the mosque during these ten days and nights of Ramadan, and the same practice was continued by his wives after his demise. This retreat starts after the morning prayers on the 20th of Ramadan. It is permissible for a person observing this seclusion to go out of the mosque for Friday prayers or for personal hygienic matters. It is reported that the Holy Prophet^(sa), while walking outside the mosque, used to enquire about a person's health without stopping.

[see article on Iti'kaf on page 30]

Night of Decrees

Ayesha relates that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said: seek the Night of Decrees among the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan (i.e. 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th or 29th). Anas says that the Holy Prophet^(sa)

said: During the Night of Decrees, the Archangel, Gabriel, appears with a host of angels and all of them pray for the person who may be standing or sitting in prayers to Allah the Exalted.

Special prayers for the Night of Decrees

Ayesha relates that she asked the Holy Prophet^(sa) that if ever she happened to discover the Night of Decrees, what special prayer should she recite. The Holy Prophet^(sa) advised her to say: O our Lord! You are forgiveness personified, Who loves forgiving, therefore forgive me.

Fitr contributions

At the end of the month of Ramadan there is a small contribution on behalf of all members of the family to be used for the benefit of the needy. It is reported that the Holy Prophet^(sa) prescribed this contribution at the end of Ramadan. It was then equivalent to a measure of dates or cereals, payable by every free person or servant, male or female, young or old from amongst the believers.

Expiation

Persons suffering from illness or those who cannot fast due to old age should expiate the omission by feeding a person for every day of the month of Ramadan, provided of course they are financially able to do so. This type of feeding or paying of an equivalent amount on behalf of a deceased is also permissible.

Fasting and Health

The Holy Prophet^(sa) is reported to have said: Keep fasts to gain health. Thus, fasting is not only a spiritual exercise but also beneficial physically; it is particularly useful for the treatment of obesity and blood pressure.

Eid-ul-Fitr

At the end of the month of Ramadan the festival to mark the end of fasts is celebrated by congregational prayers. This is governed by the following injunctions:

- To proceed to the prayers of Eid-ul-Fitr after paying the Fitr contributions (see above).

- It is desirable to have a bath in the morning.
- The use of scents was a tradition of the Holy Prophet^(sa).
- The Holy Prophet^(sa) used to eat something before going to Eid-ul-Fitr prayers.
- It was the practise of the Holy Prophet^(sa) to proceed for the prayers on foot and to return by a different route.
- Women are also exhorted to come to the prayers.
- There is no Azan (Call to Prayers) nor Iqama (the shorter call) before the Eid-ul-Fitr prayers.
- There are twelve Takbirats (with both hands raised ear high and saying ‘Allahu Akbar’, Allah is the Greatest) in the Prayers, seven in the first Raka’at and five in the second.
- The Holy Prophet^(sa) is reported to have exhorted the believers to decorate the Eid prayers with special Takbirs.

- Prayers are followed by a sermon which forms part of the Eid prayers and should be listened to attentively.
- One may follow the Eid-ul-Fitr with six days of fastings during the month of Shawwal. The Holy Prophet^(sa) is reported to have said that if anyone fasted for the whole of Ramadan and then followed it with six days of further fasting, he would have acted as if he had fasted for the whole of his life.

The Sayings of the Promised Messiah^(as) with regard to Fasts.

1. ‘Insofar as I am concerned, I do not leave a fast unless it is likely to cause my death; I do not feel inclined to leave a fast. These are blessed days and are the days of the showerings of God’s blessings and Mercy’. (*Al-Hakm*, 24.1.1901).
2. ‘Ramadan is a blessed month, a month of prayers’. (*AlHakm*, 24.1.1901).
3. ‘It is reported in Hadith that two types of people are the

most unfortunate: one who lived through Ramadan and failed to have his sins forgiven; the other who had his parents and they passed and he was unable to have his sins remitted. While a child is in the care of his parents, they bear all his worries and troubles. A man comes to know the value of his parents when he himself becomes responsible for his own affairs. In the Holy Qur’an, God has given a degree of preference to a mother, for a mother bears the hardship for her child. However infectious a disease a child may catch, maybe smallpox, cholera or plague, a mother never leaves her child. Once my daughter had cholera and her mother used to handle her vomissions and other secretions with her own hands. A mother partakes of all her child’s afflictions. This is out of natural love of which there is no parallel.’
(*Majmooa Fatawa Ahmadiyya*, Vol. 1, p.182)

4. Once the Promised Messiah^(as)

was asked about fasting while travelling. The Promised Messiah^(sa) replied: 'As far as the Holy Qur'an is concerned, it says: *Whoso among you is sick or is on a journey shall fast the same number of other days*. This means that a sick person or a traveller must not fast. This is an order and there is no option from God Almighty. In my view, a traveller should not fast. However, some people do keep fasts as a matter of course and if they do so while travelling in pursuit of this practice, there is no prohibition although one must still have regard for the injunction: *shall fast the same number of other days*. A person who goes to considerable trouble in keeping a fast while travelling tries to please God by force rather than earning His pleasure by following His commandment. This is a mistake. True belief consists of following the injunctions and prohibitions of Allah'. (*Majmooa Fatawa Ahmadiyya*, Vol. I p.179).

5. A person told the Promised Messiah^(as) that while he was at home he honestly believed that there was still some time before the starting of the fast and therefore he ate something with the intention of keeping the fast on that day. Later on he had learnt from someone else that dawn had already occurred by that specified time. This person therefore asked whether he could continue with the fast of that day. The Promised Messiah^(as) replied: In these circumstance, he had a legitimate fast and there was no need for substitution on another day, for he did his best and his intention was perfect. (*Majmooa Fatawa Ahmadiyya*, Vol. 1, p. 183).

The I'tikaf Experience

By Bockarie Tommy Kallon, London, UK

Devoting oneself wholly to God, especially during the last ten days of Ramadan, can be as rewarding as it is challenging. This article is an account of a person who did just that during the month of Ramadan in 2000. First published in the *Ahmadiyya Bulletin* UK in January 2001, it inspired some to undertake the spiritual exercise. It is abridged and republished here mainly for the benefit of our wider non-UK readership. A glossary is published at the end of this article.

O my Lord, make my entry a good entry and then make me come forth with a good forthcoming. And grant me from Thyself a helping power.”

(Ch.17: V.81)

As I woke up on the morning of Saturday 16th December 2000, this prayer was on my lips. By Maghrib that day, I was to retreat to the Fazl Mosque, London for I'tikaf. I was filled both with jubilation and trepidation. On the one hand, I felt honoured I was one of eight selected to sit I'tikaf this Ramadan. This was a chance to sever all worldly engagements and dedicate 10 nights and days exclusively to the worship of

Allah Almighty. On the other hand, having done I'tikaf for the first time the year before, I knew it was no easy sojourn. Nevertheless, as a firm believer in the efficacy of prayers, I kept on repeating this prayer throughout the day.

I arrived at the Mosque just before Maghrib and I felt a surge of excitement. This is the first Mosque built in the UK for the worship of the One and Only God. This is the Mosque that has, since the arrival of Hadhrat Amir-ul-Momineen, Khalifat-ul-Masih IV^(ru), become the beacon of light that illuminates the whole world. This is the Mosque that would be my abode for the

next 10 days. I sat in a corner and raised my hand in supplication. 'My Lord, my Allah, here I am at Thy service. There is none worthy of worship save Thee. Here I am at Thy service...'

After Iftari, we got our brief from Secretary Tarbiyyat (religious education) UK, Dr Shabir Bhatti and the Amir Mu'takifeen, Mubashar Zaffar Sahib. Some religious and general house rules were explained to us. We were to spend all our time in the remembrance of Allah, prayer and recitation of the Holy Qur'an. This meant unnecessary conversation had to be eschewed, for which reason we would have our meals separate from others who broke their fast at the Mosque taking care to remain in a persistent meditative state.

After putting up our sheets around our surrounding areas to maintain solitude, I sat reflectively in my modest creation of blue cloths, 9 feet long and 6 feet wide. This simple tent was so much more than that. It was the place where ample

tears would be shed in prayer, where a thousand supplications would be made, where greater union with the Divine would be sought. This humble tent was my own little equivalent Cave Hira.

A 'Life' in a Mu'takif's Day

Right from the inception, I kept a diary that chronicled my daily activities. Having done I'tikaf before, I had established an involved routine. Generally, after breaking the fast around 4 pm and after Maghrib prayers, I would read the Holy Qur'an till 5 pm when I would say 2 raka'ats of Nawafil (voluntary) prayer and sleep till 6 pm when we had our meal. After dinner, I would continue reading the Qur'an until it was time to lift the sheets for Isha and Tarawih prayers. Another 2 raka'ats of Nawafil were offered.

Tarawih prayers normally concluded around 9pm after which it was my time to memorise verses of the Holy Qur'an. This was one of my most enjoyable moments. It was so peaceful, no phone calls or other

distractions of daily life that made this task arduous. The lights went off at 10 pm but I would continue till midnight with my bedside lamp imprinting verse after verse on my subconscious mind. This was a daily practice but for one of the nights when Maulana Ataul Mujeeb Rashed Sahib, Imam of the London Mosque, gave us a selection of prayers of the Holy Prophet^(sa) and Promised Messiah^(as) which we were to learn and incorporate in our prayers for ourselves and the Jama'at.

At midnight, I would offer 4 raka'ats of Nawafil and retire to bed. On odd nights, I would wake up at 3 am and on even nights by 4 am latest. I would then occupy myself with Tahajjud till it was time to have our pre-dawn meal. On odd nights, I would offer 8 raka'ats of Tahajjud with extremely long Sajdah's (prostrations) and after an interval, I would offer another 8 raka'ats this time with relatively shorter Sajdah's. During the interval of up to an

hour, I would devote myself to supplicating on behalf of all those who requested prayers. On even nights, it was just 8 raka'ats with extended Sajdah's and the special requests.

At 6 am we had Sahoor and following that Fajr and the Dars-ul-Hadith. After reading the Qur'an briefly, it was time to get some sleep till 11 am. I would offer another 2 raka'ats of Nawafil and then occupy myself with reading *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* or, my absolute favourite, *Life of Muhammad* till 12:15 pm when the Dars-ul-Qur'an commenced. Zuhr prayers followed immediately after the Dars and then I would read the Qur'an or other literature till it was time to raise the sheets for Asr prayers. Another 2 raka'ats would be offered just before Asr prayers.

Between Asr and Iftari I undertook my daily exercise. Again this was one of my relaxing moments. Reading a book or rehearsing verses of the Quran memorised before, I

would pace up and down the Mosque between the main entrance and the prayer niche, otherwise known as the Mihrab. Just before proceeding to break the fast, I would retreat to my allocated area and raise my hands in prayer for the final few minutes of the fast. With Iftari came the conclusion of my 24-hour routine.

When I was not praying or reading, many a time I found myself deep in contemplation. I'tikaf coincided with the Christmas festive. Vast multitudes of mankind were making merry and engaging in many frivolous activities, totally oblivious of the purpose of life. My mind would then travel back to the time of the Holy Prophet^(sa) and wonder what must have been going through his mind as he repaired to the solitary confines of Cave Hira. And then the Divine Call inviting him to the ministry as the voice articulate of this historical epoch, the persecution that ensued, his resignation and patience, his steadfastness and high resolve,

his affability to the humble, his dignified bearing to the presumptuous, all of which alike evoked admiration and procured respect. Would that I could behold his countenance – a countenance wherein the awesomeness of his majesty was tempered by his amiable kindness. Would that I were one of his Companions. What would I have wanted most? To share in his privations and persecution, to stand alongside him at the Battle of Badr, to observe him in prayer, indeed to have him pray for me personally, to listen to his Tilawat, in general, to marvel at him as he discharged both his prophetic and humbler offices as a ruler, father, husband and friend.

The Prayers

Over the years, Hadhrat Amir-ul-Momineen has taught us how to pray and who to pray for. It is such a comprehensive list that incorporates all sections of the Jama'at. After praying for the Holy Prophet^(sa), the Promised Messiah^(as), their families and righteous followers through the

ages and after prayers for our beloved Huzoor and his family, the success of Islam through Ahmadiyyat, the UK Jama'at and its leadership – the missionaries, the devotees of the Jama'at, the persecuted and their families, the martyrs and their families, the office bearers and Jama'at workers, the auxiliary organisations and their leadership, Waqfe Nau children, the infirm, the unmarried, the unemployed, the newly wed, the barren, the divorced, the widowed, the orphaned, the students, the new converts, those burdened with debt, those involved with court cases, the asylum seekers, the starving and the aggrieved were all singled out for special prayers.

Quite apart from this list, there were individual requests that were made well before I'tikaf started. This list was to steadily grow so that by the end of I'tikaf it ran into well over 100 names, a handful being from overseas Jama'ats. I maintained a record of all requests and, as mentioned above, I would devote an hour

during the night to supplicating according to the purport of the request or in general, if the request was not specific. I would go through the list ticking off the names to ensure I have prayed for all those who requested.

Many of those who requested prayers of the Mu'takifeen would bring along some food, usually a basket of fruits or Indian sweets. This became an amusing subject for us. We had so much food at a time when we were supposed to eat sparingly so as to wake up easily for Tahajjud. At the same time, we were duty bound, for blessings on the donor, to partake of some of the food.

My prayers were not just limited to those who had directly requested me. There are many that I know would have asked had we spoken and all of them were remembered in my prayers. I would supplicate on behalf of all the above before praying for my nation, my family and, finally, my humble self.

The Last Day

After Asr on the final day, we had a blessed audience with Hadhrat Amir-ul-Momineen. After greeting all of us, Huzur sat with us. Curiously, he addressed me first. 'Is this your first time Kallon Sahib?' as he affectionately calls me. 'No, Huzur, I was here last year', I replied. After he had enquired the same from all others, Huzur turned to the subject of beards. He wanted to know who had grown a beard. As usual he had a few jokes. This year, however, Huzur understandably was very brief¹ but last year I recall distinctly when he enquired from us as to what night we thought was Laylatul Qadr, we all put forward different nights, some even more than one night. This is why the Holy Prophet^(sa) said we must 'seek' our Laylatul Qadr, Huzur remarked. Huzur gave us each Indian sweets, a basket of fruits and Iftari. All these were to be cherished over the next few days after Ramadan.

When Huzur had departed, all Mu'takifeen returned to our

allocated areas this time without the sheets. Ramadan and hence I'tikaf, was almost over. Everyone was going through emotions as they engaged in their final supplications. Having slept only from 1:00 am to 2:30 am on the last night, I was physically and mentally exhausted but my heart was full of joy and gratitude to Allah Almighty by Whose Grace and by Whose Grace alone, I had made it through another I'tikaf. I looked across with just pride and admiration at each one of my fellow Mu'takifeen. We had been through I'tikaf together; we had been there for each other. We would share personal food gifts, wake each other up for night vigils, encourage each other even. As the clock ticked away then all I did was pray on our behalf even as Hadhrat Ibrahim^(as) and his son Hadhrat Ishmael^(as) prayed when they rebuilt the Holy Ka'aba:

Our Lord, accept this from us; for Thou art the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.
(Ch.2: V.128)

I'TIKAF WAS INITIATED BY THE HOLY PROPHET^(SA). HE DID IT EVERY YEAR AND IN THE LAST YEAR OF HIS LIFE HE DID IT FOR 20 DAYS RATHER THAN THE USUAL 10. THIS SHOWS HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE HE ATTACHED TO IT. THE JAMA'AT IS GROWING AT AN EXPONENTIAL RATE WHICH MEANS GREATER COMPETITION FOR PLACES. WE MUST SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY WHILE THERE IS RELATIVELY LESS COMPETITION NOW AND WHILE WE ENJOY GOOD HEALTH AND YOUTH.

The Blessings of I'tikaf

Imam Sahib light-heartedly, and yet quite appropriately, refers to I'tikaf as 'the spiritual MOT²'. *'Surely, there is ease after hardship'* (Ch.94: v.6). I'tikaf challenges you; I'tikaf changes you. It strengthens your faith and characterises it with sincerity and devotion. You are more diligent in your worship. You are accustomed to voluntary prayers let alone the obligatory ones. Waking up for Tahajjud is no longer cumbersome. Reading the Qur'an is a habit you crave. Attending the mosque is a practice you love. I'tikaf teaches you the beauty of prayer; it proves to you the acceptance of prayer. How much can be achieved in a life without an excessive devotion to the TV, the

stereo, the phone, the Internet and email, is a valuable lesson of I'tikaf.

On this note, I look back in utter amazement on how much was achieved, weak and ignorant, humble and resourceless though I am, during those 10 days compared with the rest of the year. Apart from saying all daily prayers at the mosque for 10 days, I was enabled, through Divine Grace, to offer over and above that 320 raka'ats of Nawafil, 120 by way of Tahajjud and 80 by way of Tarawih, to memorise 76 verses of the Holy Qur'an and 8 prayers of the Holy Prophet^(sa) and the Promised Messiah^(as), participate in 10 sessions each of Dars-ul-Qur'an and Dars-ul-Hadith, and to stay

in and around the Mosque for some 240 hours in a continual state of Wudhu.

Conclusion

Say, 'If you love Allah, then follow me: then will Allah love you and forgive you your faults. And Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful.'

(Ch.3: V.32)

I'tikaf was initiated by the Holy Prophet^(sa). He did it every year and in the last year of his life he did it for 20 days rather than the usual 10. This shows how much importance he attached to it. The Jama'at is growing at an exponential rate which means greater competition for places. We must seize this opportunity while there is relatively less competition now and while we enjoy good health and youth.

I request our readership to pray that Allah grants gracious acceptance to our I'tikaf for indeed our supplications, our striving and our sacrifices are all unworthy of acceptance but for the grace of Allah. May Allah so

ordain that in the coming years every mosque is filled with Mu'takifeen, humbly atoning for past wrongs and shortcomings, intent on winning His pleasure and nearness, proclaiming His glory, celebrating His praise, affirming His Unity, invoking His choicest blessings on His Noble Prophet^(sa).

1. The late Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IV^(ru) was at the time recovering from an ailment.
2. In the UK, an MOT is an annual certification of a vehicle's roadworthiness.

A glossary of some of the terms used in this article is printed overleaf.

Glossary of Terms

<u>TERM</u>	<u>DEFINITION</u>
Tarbiyyat.....	Tarbiyyal Spiritual training and discipline. Also one of the administrative departments within the Community.
Mutakif.....	Person who goes into retreat into the mosque during the last 10 days of Ramadan.
Mutakifeen.....	Plural of Mutakif.
Maghrib.....	One of the five daily prayers offered after sunset
Ishaa.....	One of the five daily prayers offered at night.
Fajr.....	One of the five daily prayers offered before sunrise.
Zuhr.....	One of the five daily prayers offered just after noon.
Asr.....	One of the five daily prayers offered mid afternoon.
Nawafil.....	Voluntary prayers. Singular Nafl
Raka'at.....	Unit of prayer. Singular Rak'at.
Tarawih.....	An extra prayer service held every evening during Ramadan. Normally the Holy Qur'an is recited from beginning to end.
Jama'at.....	Community
Tahajjud.....	Predawn supererogatory prayer.
Sahoor.....	Predawn meal taken prior to commencing the fast.
Iftari.....	Food taken by way of breaking the fast
Dars.....	Lecture (usually on the Holy Qur'an or traditions of the Holy Prophet(sa)).
Dars-ul-Hadith.....	A discussion on the Traditions of the Holy Prophet(sa).
Dars-ul-Qur'an.....	Recitation and exposition of the Holy Qur'an
Cave Hira.....	Cave where the Holy Prophet of Islam(sa) used to go into retreat and from where he received the first Divine Call.
Battle of Badr.....	First battle fought by the early Muslims against the Meccan transgressors.
Tilawat.....	Recitation of the Holy Qur'an.
Khuddam-ul-Ahmadiyya.....	Name given to the auxiliary youth organisation for boys/men between the ages of 15 and 40.
Qaid.....	Leader
Hadhrrat Amir-ul-Momineen.....	His Holiness, the Commander of the Faithful. A title used for the Head of the Ahmadiyya Community.
Lailatul Qadr.....	Night of Decrees. A blessed night that occurs in the last 10 nights of Ramadan.
Imam.....	A religious leader, usually one who leads the prayer service.
Wudhu.....	Ablution

Epilogue

This is the final chapter from the book *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth*, written by the late Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (may Allah have mercy upon him). The book has received much critical acclaim and clearly illustrates the author's immense spiritual and philosophical knowledge on a range of subjects. At the end of this concluding chapter, details are given about how to obtain a copy from either the Ahmadiyya community or possibly from your local bookstore.



In the end, we turn to the issue of non-prophetic revelation. It is hard to entertain the idea that the phenomenon of non-prophetic revelation should also come to an end with the ending of prophethood. Continuity of Divine revelation is indispensable for supporting a profound unshakeable belief in God which cannot be attained with the help of rational investigation alone. Hence, revelation must always play a major role in strengthening belief in the existence of an Omniscient, Omnipotent God.

Revelation is not confined solely to the office of prophethood. It is simply a means of communion between God and man. It is a universally shared experience; to deny it is to deny the testimony of millions of people from all ages all over the world.

It is mostly bestowed upon such servants of God as have attuned themselves to His will with unreserved dedication. Those who do not believe in God, or only believe in Him impersonally with just a vague notion of His existence, are least likely to be blessed with the honour of revelation. The same applies to the excessively sinful people, entirely given up to the vain pursuits of material gains and worldly pleasures. Yet even such as they are not altogether denied an occasional glimpse of His Grace. None can stop God from bestowing

REVELATION IS NOT CONFINED SOLELY TO THE OFFICE OF PROPHETHOOD. IT IS SIMPLY A MEANS OF COMMUNION BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. IT IS A UNIVERSALLY SHARED EXPERIENCE; TO DENY IT IS TO DENY THE TESTIMONY OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FROM ALL AGES ALL OVER THE WORLD.

true dreams, visions and verbal revelations, whenever and to whomsoever He pleases.

Revelations are not always indicative of the piety of the person who receives them. They work sometimes as a reminder to humankind at large that God does exist and that He is free to communicate with whomsoever He pleases.

Such sample communication is not a prerogative of any particular religion or country or age. It is common to all. Had it not been so, the very faith in the existence of God and the institution of revelation would have faded out of existence. Specimen revelations are like odd, unexpected showers in the midst of a desert, creating life-supporting oases in the vast deathly expanse of a sandy wilderness.

Some non-believers however, dismiss this universal testimony as mere psychic illusion. Of course, psychic illusions cannot be ruled out, but the evidence of Divine revelation is so distinctly different from ordinary psychic ravings that one should not be confused with the other. The difference is as wide and clear as that between life and death or between light and darkness. However, it is also true that the evidence of genuine revelation becomes rarer to find as we move away from the age of a prophet. The growing influence of materialism acts upon the people as a poison which pollutes their minds and

corrodes the purity of their hearts. Faith in Divine revelation dissipates by the same proportion. An ice-age of scepticism eventually sets in and an era of spiritual death begins. All that survives is falsehood and deception. Hypocrisy infiltrates and desecrates religions. Most believers are merely so-called; their way of life gives a lie to their faith. Truth practically vanishes from all spheres of human occupation. Doubt, even disbelief, begin to encroach upon the territories of faith. Godliness beats retreat. Yet the communion between God and man never ceases altogether. Revelation continues to resuscitate faith. As for those who glow with His love, even amidst total darkness, God reveals Himself to them with unmatched brilliance. The sample sprinkling of revelation upon an age of doubt and ignorance is not to be compared with the expression of love from God to His devoted servants. This is the consistent message of the Holy Qur'an. It clearly promises the believer the blessings of Divine revelation unceasingly at all ages. It admonishes the Holy Prophet(sa) to proclaim:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ
 فَمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ
 بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

Say, I am but a man like yourselves, only I am recipient of revelation which admonishes that your God is only One God. Hence whoever among you desires to meet his Lord (as I have) then he too should perform righteous deeds and should not join partners in the worship of his Lord.¹

(Ch.18: V.111)

The expression *desires to meet* is evidently linked to the preceding mention of revelation. But the decision concerning anyone's worthiness in this regard always lies with God and not with man.

The same promise of revelation is vouched even more clearly in other verses to all such believers as remain steadfast in their loyalty to God at times of trials:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا
تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ * نَحْنُ
أَوْلِيَاكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ

Verily those who proclaim that God is our Lord and then hold fast (to this claim), angels descend upon them incessantly saying 'Do not fear nor grieve; but rejoice in the Paradise you were promised.

We remain your friends in this life and in the life to come...²
(Ch.41; Vs.31-32)

These verses leave no room for doubt on the issue of continuity of revelation. The Qur'an further states:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا
دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي

When My servants ask thee about Me, tell them, I am close, I do answer the call of the caller when he seeks Me. So they too should respond to Me...³

(Ch.2: V.187)

Here the promise of revelation is widened to include all servants of God who sincerely seek Him and submissively respond to His Call. This is a universal promise, not confined to any particular age or people.

MAN SHALL ALWAYS STAND IN NEED OF DIVINE REVELATION. AFTER THE INSTITUTION OF PROPHETHOOD, IT IS REVELATION WHICH KEEPS THE LAMP OF FAITH ALIGHT ABOVE ALL OTHER MEANS OF RATIONAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION. THROUGH REVELATION, MAN IS REASSURED OF THE EXISTENCE OF A LIVING GOD

Islam, in short, is a religion of eternal hope which does not relegate communion with God only to the past. His interest in human affairs as a Benign Mentor shall never cease. He is accessible when sought for and responds when prayed to. He is Eternal, none of His attributes will ever die.

Man shall always stand in need of Divine revelation. After the institution of prophethood, it is revelation which keeps the lamp of faith alight above all other means of rational and philosophical investigation. Through revelation, man is reassured of the existence of a Living God. He bestows such signs of nearness to Him as are not only subjective in their nature but are also objectively verifiable. Revelation builds faith on solid belief, dismissing all wavering doubts. The greatest tragedy of contemporary Islam is for it to fall under the ominous spell of medieval clergy and modern intellectuals. To the medievalists goes the lion's share of the kill but the great thinkers like 'Allamah Iqbal and theologians like Maudoodi are not far behind in vying for the leftovers. Iqbal as an able disciple of Nietzsche, forever does away with the need of Divine guidance. Maudoodi, a cross-breed of Pauline and Bahai wedlock, does away with prophethood lest its denial should make it a precursor to the curse of God. So between these two stalwarts nothing is left of prophethood or revelation leaving Islam emptied of all hope. The real import of their philosophy could not be summed up better than in the following words of Faiz Ahmad

Faiz, one of the greatest Urdu poets of modern times:

اجنبی خاک نے دُستِ ادا دئے قدموں کے چراغ
گلی کرو شمعیں بڑھا دو سے وینا و ایغ
اپنے بے خواب کواڑوں کو منتقل کرو
اب یہاں کوئی نہیں ، کوئی نہیں آئے گا

Alien dust has obscured every footprint.

Extinguish the lamps and take away the goblets and pitchers of wine.

Shut your sleepless doors and lock them up.

None will come! No one will ever come!!

Alas prophecy and revelation, the very soul and spirit of every living religion are thus expunged from the body of Islam. A zombie-like existence is all that is left into the bargain. An exasperating, meaningless semblance of life! Why can they not read the message writ large on the wall of history?

Remove revelation altogether from religious experience, and faith would be reduced to myths and legends. Do away with Divine revelation, and the spiritual life would forthwith lose its meaning and religion its purpose.

Revelation enlightens belief, illuminates the soul and blows the breath of life into faith. In the pitch darkness of materialism, when despondency is compounded by atheism, it is revelation which sheds the light that turns despair into hope and the night of disbelief into a day of belief. What the sun is to the day, a prophet is to religion. What stars are to a moonless night, revelation is to the obscurities of faithlessness!

Women in the Holy Qur'an

by Tehmeena Luqman – Oregon, USA.

This is a version of a speech delivered on September 7, 2002 at the occasion of the launching of the Holy Qur'an CD with English translation, in Portland, Oregon. Approximately 450 guests were in attendance, including over 400 non-Ahmadi/Muslim guests. This particular speech focused on women in the Holy Qur'an.

Imagine the deserts of Arabia over 1,400 years ago. The teachings of prophets like Abraham^(as) have long been abandoned. There is no moral compass guiding the existence of these nomadic tribes. Imagine a man and woman in great despair. It could be the scene described in the Holy Qur'an:

He hides himself from the people because of bad news he has had, 'Shall he keep it in spite of disgrace or bury it in the dust?'

(Ch.16: V.60)

Since it is Arabia 1,400 years ago, the new father had little choice but to take his newborn daughter into the desert and bury her alive.

Is this the society, we imagine when we call ourselves civilised and modern? Why is it that even as women are granted more rights and freedoms through the laws of our societies, it becomes increasingly more dangerous to be a woman? What makes us so different from a society 1,400 years ago that buried its daughters alive? We have laws against rape, assault, domestic violence, against sexual harassment and discrimination. Yet more than half our world's population continuously struggles to gain the sort of respect that provides stability and safety in their lives. The only conclusion is that no matter how many laws are written, nothing will ever make up for the lack of inherence when it comes to women's rights. Very few rights

ISLAM NOT ONLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN, IT ESTABLISHES A POSITIVE MINDSET BY MAKING THOSE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS AN INHERENT PART OF OUR EXISTENCE.

granted to women throughout the world are inherent; rather they were won through long years of struggle by various women's movements, primarily in the last hundred years.

Yet, when we discuss Islam and the Holy Qur'an's teachings regarding the role and treatment of women in society, the first thing we learn is that women are given respect and dignity from Allah. They were given rights over 1,400 years ago that many women in the Western world could only dream about until a hundred years ago. Islam not only acknowledges the rights of women, it establishes a positive mindset by making those rights and freedoms an inherent part of our existence.

It is through the Holy Qur'an that we learn Allah's intention for all of mankind, men and women, to

have equality on a social and spiritual level. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah says:

I will allow not the work of any worker from among you, whether male or female, to be lost.

(Ch.3: V.196)

Islam elevated the social status of women to an unimaginable level. Prior to the revelation of the Holy Qur'an and establishment of Islam, women were treated as second or third class citizens, behind slaves and even animals. They had no claim over their lives, bodies, children or property. From the very beginning, women were seen as inciting evil, with the example of Eve inciting Adam^(as) to eat the forbidden fruit. In many other societies, there was no real basis governing social or moral behavior. Consequently, the

treatment of women throughout the world, religious or not, was abhorrent.

The teachings of Islam presented through the Holy Qur'an and the example of the Holy Prophet^(sa) ushered in a new era for women. Islam immediately banned the practice of infanticide. The Holy Prophet^(sa) stated that:

‘He who has a daughter and does not bury her alive, nor humiliate her, nor give a son preference over her will be admitted to Paradise by Allah.’

But even more than the gift of life, women are given honour and respect in their life. In the Holy Qur'an, men are told in regards to their treatment of women to:

...consort with them in kindness; and if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing wherein Allah has placed much good.
(Ch.4: V.20)

Parents are told to treat their daughters especially well. The wife of the Holy Prophet^(sa), Hadhrat Ayesha^(ra) relates that a woman once came begging with her two daughters. Hadhrat Ayesha^(ra) only had a single date to give her. The woman divided the date between her daughters and did not eat any herself. Hadhrat Ayesha^(ra) related the story to the Prophet Muhammad^(sa), who replied:

‘One who is given daughters and treats them well will find that they will become one's shield from the Fire’
(*Bukhari and Muslim*)

Women are further honoured in their role as wives. The Holy Prophet^(sa) once said:

‘The most perfect believer is one whose behaviour is the best and the best among you is one who behaves best towards their wives.’
(*Tirmidhi*)

In a marriage, men and women are partners in a special rela-

tionship created by Allah. He instructed through the Holy Qur'an that just as men had certain rights over women, women have certain rights over men. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah says:

And one of His Signs is this, that He has created wives for you from among yourselves that you may find peace of mind in them, and He has put love and tenderness between you.

(Ch.30: V.22)

The sad reality is that not all marriages last forever, but the triumph of Islam in this matter is that women for the first time were given the right to ask for a divorce from their husbands. This is astonishing given that many Western countries did not allow women to divorce their husbands except in very extreme cases, if even that, until the early 1900's.

It is mothers that are most honoured above all male or female roles in Islam. The Holy

Prophet^(sa) repeatedly stated that, 'Paradise lies under the feet of the mother,' meaning that the way to heaven is treating one's mother well. A companion of the Holy Prophet^(sa) relates the story of a man who approached the Holy Prophet^(sa) and inquired, 'O Messenger of Allah! Of all people, whom should I honour and respect the most?' He replied, 'Your mother.' The man enquired a second time, 'And then who?' The Holy Prophet^(sa) replied, 'Your mother.' The man asked a third time, 'Who then?' 'Your mother,' was the reply. The man asked once more, 'Then who?' Then Holy Prophet^(sa) replied, 'Your father.'

But even as women are honoured for their roles as daughters, wives and mothers, they are respected and encouraged in many other roles throughout their lives. Muslim women are required to be students, as the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman. Islam instructs that the best men are those who educate their daughters well. In

ALLAH, THROUGH THE TEACHINGS OF ISLAM 1,400 YEARS AGO, GAVE WOMEN THE RIGHT TO INHERIT THE PROPERTY OF THEIR FATHERS, MOTHERS, BROTHERS AND HUSBANDS. AGAIN, THIS WAS UNHEARD OF IN MANY PARTS OF THE SO-CALLED FIRST WORLD UNTIL THE EARLY 1900'S.

Islam, women are also property holders. Through the teachings of Islam 1,400 years ago, Allah gave women the right to inherit the property of their fathers, mothers, brothers and husbands. Again, this was unheard of in many parts of the so-called First World until the early 1900's. Muslim women are also encouraged to participate in the political systems of their country, along with their male counterparts.

Aside from spiritual and social equality, the Holy Qur'an also helps us understand our roles and responsibilities as humans, and especially as women. While their status is the same, their roles are inherently different due to the laws of nature. Because of these laws, women carry three specific burdens that determine their role in society. They carry the two

burdens of beauty and childbirth because of the way Allah created them. Thirdly, they are responsible for the moral upbringing of their children because of the instinctual bond created between a mother and child. It is because of these burdens, that Muslim women are not required to work outside the home. The burden of providing for the family thus falls on the man in the household. Women are not prohibited from working outside the home, however, they are not required to in order to lighten the immense responsibilities that women already carry. Consider that every woman, regardless of which society or religion she belongs, is given these vast responsibilities, whether she accepts it or not. Yet it is only through Islam that mankind is taught to honour and praise women for the burdens they bear.

It is impossible to discuss women in the Holy Qur'an without mentioning the two women that Allah blessed with extraordinary lives and praised in the pages of His Holy Book:

And Allah sets forth for those who believe the example of the wife of Pharaoh when she said, 'My Lord! Build for me a house with Thee in the Garden, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his work and deliver me from the wrongdoing people; and the example of Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity – so We breathed into her of Our Spirit – and she fulfilled in her person the words of her Lord and His Books and was one of the obedient.

(Ch 66: Vs.12-13)

The story of Mary, mother of Jesus^(as) is oft-repeated in the Holy Qur'an. We are told in Chapter 3, that Mary's mother devoted her to the service of Allah even before she was born. She grew to be a pious, righteous

woman, so much so that Allah chose her to be the mother of the Messiah. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an that He chose Mary above the women of all people because she preserved her chastity (Ch.3: V.43). What is most important about the stories of the wife of the Pharaoh and Mary, is that Allah commands all believing men and women to look towards them as examples for us all. They are women who have attained the highest status in the sight of Allah and they did it by being chaste, obedient, pious and truthful. Consider especially the case of Mary, a woman revered by billions around the world. No other woman has achieved the status she has. Yet, as a woman living over 2,000 years ago, she had none of the secular 'rights' that many women have today.

After having discussed women praised by Allah for preserving their chastity, it is fitting to conclude with a look at the concept of modesty in Islam. The idea of the Islamic covering is one of the most misunderstood and

THE REQUIRED OUTER COVERING NOT ONLY DISTINGUISHES A WOMAN AS MUSLIM, IT ALSO PROTECTS HER FROM NEGATIVE OUTSIDE INFLUENCE, SPECIFICALLY FROM BEING MOLESTED. AT ANOTHER LEVEL, THE OUTER COVERING ACCOMPLISHES WHAT WOMEN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD CONTINUE TO STRIVE FOR: RESPECT FOR THEIR CHARACTER AND INTELLIGENCE RATHER THAN THEIR LOOKS AND WHAT THEY MAY OR MAY NOT BE WEARING.

most often degraded aspects of Islam by many. Yet, the laws of this land and many others do not even come close to doing for women and their protection what the Islamic teachings of modesty and appropriate covering do. We read:

Say to the believing men they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is well aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts and they not display their beauty and embellishments except that which is apparent thereof,

and that they draw their head-coverings over their bosoms, and that they disclose not their beauty save to their husbands... and they walk not in a style that such of their beauty as they conceal is noticed.

(Ch.24: Vs.31-32)

Further in the Holy Qur'an, Allah instructs:

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers that they should pull down upon them of their outer cloaks from their heads over their faces. That is more likely that they may thus be distin-

*guished and not molested.
And Allah is Most Forgiving,
Merciful.*
(Ch.33: V.60)

As noted before, a woman's beauty is among the burdens Allah has placed on her. This is merely the articulation of something that all of us who watch television or read magazines know to be true. It is women who are used to sell goods because of their beauty. They are commodified and objectified merely because of their gender. Islam protects women from this type of objectification. The required outer covering not only distinguishes a woman as Muslim, it also protects her from negative outside influence, specifically from being molested. At another level, the outer covering accomplishes what women throughout the world continue to strive for: respect for their character and intelligence rather than their looks and what they may or may not be wearing.

Even those Islamic command-

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD^(sa) ONCE SAID: 'ALLAH I DECLARE SINFUL ANY FAILURE TO SAFEGUARD THE RIGHTS OF TWO WEAK ONES: ORPHANS AND WOMEN.' SAFEGUARDING RIGHTS REQUIRES AN ATTITUDE OF RESPECT. IT REQUIRES THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF EACH OTHER AND DO NOT SEE EACH OTHER AS INFERIOR. THE DIFFICULTY TODAY IS THAT WOMEN ARE NOT HONOURED, RATHER THEY ARE OBJECTIFIED AND DEGRADED. IN OUR RUSH TO SECURE MORE AND MORE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS, IN THE NAME OF LIBERATION, WE HAVE LOST SIGHT OF HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO PROTECT YOUNG GIRLS AND WOMEN

ments that may seem oppressive are in fact meant to preserve the dignity of women. Through the Holy Qur'an, Allah handed down all the rights and freedoms for Muslim men and women. It is up to us to preserve them. The Prophet Muhammad^(sa) once said:

‘Allah I declare sinful any failure to safeguard the rights of two weak ones: orphans and women.’ Safeguarding rights requires an attitude of respect. It requires that we understand the value of each other and do not see each other as inferior. The difficulty today is that women are not honoured, rather they are objectified and degraded. In our rush to secure more and more rights and freedoms, in the name of liberation, we have lost sight of how important it is to protect young girls and women. The number of young boys abducted and killed, while tragic, does not even compare to the number of girls that are assaulted, kidnapped or killed, or the number of women who suffer from domestic violence. We have more laws than ever, more police than ever, but we have more problems than ever before.

Bear in mind that America’s Emancipation Proclamation did not cure racism. The Equal Protection clause of the United States Constitution is not stopping discrimination.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to dictate attitude through laws. But religion can and does. The Holy Qur’an specifically addresses the treatment of individuals in society and establishes an attitude towards them, before dictating laws. It establishes a mindset towards women that honours and protects them at the same time, yet it also places responsibility on women to safeguard themselves. It was through the Holy Qur’an that women were granted extraordinary rights and freedoms, not from man, governments or referendums. The Holy Qur’an does more for women’s rights than Feminism, Women’s Liberation, or a potential Constitutional Equal Rights Amendment will ever be able to do. That is one of the most profound beauties of the Holy Qur’an.

STRESS – A Spiritual Perspective and its Management

by Dr. Ihsan-Ul-Hague, MB FRCP Consultant Physician – Pakistan

The following article was first published in its abridged version by THE DAWN (newspaper) in its Sunday magazine of 21 July 2002.

Stress may be the greatest, single contributor to illness in the industrialised world.

Stress is an oft-spoken word, being used rather loosely in the lay public for whatever it might mean. On the science-oriented platform, stress has been a subject of interest to psychologists, behavioural analysts, physiologists and physicians. It has been extensively researched and talked about. I feel that stress has a significant spiritual perspective, the understanding of which should help its management.

It is an inescapable fact of life that the physical being of life, is inseparable from it and closely integrated to the spiritual side. The two aspects of life are

complementary to each other and create a specific milieu for the individual. In illness and adversity, the spiritual being of the individual supports and sustains the physical existence during abnormal times. Thus, stress becomes a life long associate of body, mind and soul.

It is not easy to define stress and indeed it is a subject with diverse implications. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines stress as: ‘Constraining or compelling force, effort, demand upon physical or mental energy.’

I would define ‘Stress’ in simple terms as a state where physical, mental and emotional reserves are being tested beyond the capacity of the body and mind, which cannot bear it or withstand

it. Stress, I may say, is a state of being ill-at-ease. In the 1920's Walter Cannon, the distinguished American physiologist, first called attention to stress as the 'fight or flight' response. Wilhelm Raab subsequently demonstrated the risks inducing effects of excess of hormones, adrenaline and cortisol. It was Hans Selye, however, who gave new meaning to the term stress and proved in his animal experiments that it contributed significantly to the development of disease. The disease, he discovered, could be fatal and could occur in man.

Stress, for good or bad, is a part of life. To understand its genesis, it is pivotal that man understands the purpose and ultimate goal of his life. Man owes his birth and existence solely to God, Creator and Sustainer of all. It is God who has ordained for man a purposeful and useful course in life to justify his existence. The purpose of life enunciated in God's holy Word is:

I have not created men and

jinn but that they and worship Me.

(Ch.51: V.57)

Thus the true purpose of man's life is the worship of God, loving Him and showing complete devotion to Him.

In worship, the spiritual state of one's being should transcend the mere observance of certain rites and rituals. Worship is an attempt at and practise of total subjugation and submission to God's Will. Man's actions and deeds, become subordinate to the passion of winning His and only His pleasure. God's will is operative in two spheres, which are interlinked and mutually complementary. Firstly, it is the matter of discharge of one's duties to his Maker. Secondly, it is the fulfillment of one's obligations towards fellow creatures. An insight into God's word in the Qur'an enlightens us with the knowledge that, acquittal of our obligations towards, not only mankind but all God's creations, in reality embodies and enshrines the

discharge of duties towards Him. Our service to fellow creatures is, prima facie, service to God. This attitude in leading life should provide us with the greatest sense of accomplishment, comfort and solace, leading to peace of mind.

To fulfill a moral and spiritual aim of life, God has created man in His own image. Thus, man has been endowed with attributes, which indeed are sprinkling of God's own attributes. God's attributes being limitless imponderable and unfathomable in nature, design and measure, there is for man a scope for constant learning, advancement, progress and improvement. But man's capacity to perform will always remain dependent on and limited to the extent, he can nurture, harness and utilise the faculties, capabilities and qualities endowed by God. Thus it behoves man to inquire, search and explore the nature, scope and extent of his endowments and qualities. This in turn should enable him to progress, from an

animal state to a moral state and finally to a spiritual state.

God has revealed:

We have created man in the best mould, then, if he works iniquity, we cast him as the lowest of low except those who believe and do good work for them is unending reward.

(Ch.95: Vs.5-7)

God has also enjoined:

Allah requires not of anyone that, which is beyond his capacity, each shall have the benefit of the good he does and shall suffer the consequences of the ill he works. Supplicate, therefore: Lord take us not to task if we forget or fall into error.....Lord burden us not with that which we have not the strength to bear; overlook our defaults and grant us forgiveness and have mercy on us'

(Ch.2: V.287)

AS ONE COMMONLY EXPERIENCES, IT IS THE FEAR OF UNKNOWN AND HIDDEN, WHICH IS THE CAUSE OF STRESS. CULTIVATION OF FAITH WITH UNSHAKABLE BELIEF IN THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD AS ALL POWERFUL AND THE FINAL ARBITRATOR, A CONSTANT ENDEAVOUR TO PERFORM SOLELY TO WIN HIS PLEASURE AND SELF ABNEGATION IN FAVOUR OF HIS WILL, ARE THE IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF AN EXERCISE TO CONQUER STRESS.

Mind and body are integrated and inter-related. One without the other is redundant. In the final analysis, what reigns supreme over mind is his moral and spiritual status. It is the strength or weakness of spiritual state of mind which determines the onset and progression of stress, affecting the entire physical being but more significantly, as we know, the heart. Again, in the light of spiritual state of human being, stress by virtue of creating a challenge can trigger off the birth of a more determined and finally, more accomplished personality. On the other hand, a person of feebler mind and lesser spiritual strength may succumb to the onslaught of stress, both physically and emotionally.

The spiritual status depends upon the human recognition of a Superhuman, All-Pervasive, Omnipotent controlling Power. It also rests on one's belief in and reliance on, the ubiquity, omnipresence and invincibility of that Power. This faith is the very foundation and all time nourishment of life without which one becomes rudderless and loses his moorings. A weakness in this faith is at the root of the genesis of stress. It is inherent in one's faith that one is cognisant of the unknown and the unseen, accepting the absolute and inevitable in God's domain. As one commonly experiences, it is the fear of unknown and hidden, which is the cause of stress. Cultivation of faith with unshakable belief in

the Attributes of God as All Powerful and the final Arbitrator, a constant endeavour to perform solely to win His pleasure and self abnegation in favour of His will, are the important components of an exercise to conquer stress.

At the root of man's struggle for existence and strive for achievements and accomplishments, is an inherent desire to compete and excel and, in return, to receive rewards, approbation, applause and accolades from his masters and peers. One also has to have his ego satisfied and vanity boosted. However, these are physical instincts not providing with, eternal peace of mind and happiness. These instincts if not modulated, will become overbearing and lead to stress. Having attained a spiritual state after having progressed from an animal state and intermediary moral state, one is able to subject oneself to the will of God. He, then, looks for approbation from God and no one else. God's approbation being unadulterated,

bountiful and eternal, affords a heavenly peace of mind.

Often, a subconscious or even an overt feeling of inadequacy of talent and sense of inferiority by way of impaired qualities, lack of endowments and achievements make one suffer through lowering of self-esteem. But, this is the time and opportunity to remember that God has created man in the best of moulds and it is for man to develop and nurture his faculties to avoid iniquity. He would then be steering away from stress.

A deeper insight into human nature (or even the nature of animals) reveals the fact that the ultimate of satisfaction, consolation and emotional satiety lies in giving away of one's self. The quality of graciousness flows in our veins and it is the offshoot of God's attributes of 'Rahmaniyat' (Grace). The mother gives away her best to her child. The employee performs for his employer and the servant serves his master. The teacher wants his pupil to excel and the physician

IN THE BACKGROUND OF STRESS, THERE COMMONLY IS A FEELING OF DISGUST AND FRUSTRATION ARISING OUT OF A SITUATION WHERE RESULTS AND REWARDS OF ONE'S EFFORTS ARE NOT IN KEEPING WITH ONE'S ASSUMED TALENT, CAPABILITIES, IMPORTANCE AND EFFORT..... HERE TOO, FAITH SHOULD COME TO ONE'S RESCUE BY PROVIDING HIM WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE THAT HE HAS DONE HIS BEST, TO THE LIMIT OF HIS ABILITY AND CAPACITY.THE REWARD OF MAN'S ACTION LIES SOLELY WITH GOD, THE EVER MERCIFUL AND LORD OF THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT.

gives his best to save life of the patient under his care. However, the quality of graciousness even though inherent, may remain dormant till exploited and utilised for the welfare of mankind. The service to mankind wins pleasure of God and gratitude of fellow beings, giving Divine bliss and acting as an antidote to stress.

The every day situation that creates stress is a mismatch between your expectations and your environment. Stress follows when, you hope what will happen, does not and, you begin to think it never will. This mismatch occurs regularly and with more serious implications,

at interpersonal relationship. It is my contention that at the root of such a predicament is the absence or lack of quality of graciousness. It is the quality of graciousness, which enables one to be more considerate and understanding. Managing stress actually means controlling anger and anxiety you face during the mismatch. The quality of graciousness makes you more flexible and resilient, you learn to see and develop options for yourself. This does not mean, you will not suffer at times. Rather, it means, you will not be overwhelmed and you will learn to see the situation as a challenge you can meet. The more you try and rise to the occasion, the more

you will feel a sense of self-control and accomplishment. Stress is a burden when you respond to it with loss of control. It is crucial for you to realise that you can alter the environment only to a limited extent. Mostly, it is your own reaction (or overreaction) that needs to be tamed to avoid being brutalised by the force of circumstances.

In the background of stress, there commonly is a feeling of disgust and frustration arising out of a situation where results and rewards of one's efforts are not in keeping with one's assumed talent, capabilities, importance and effort. He also finds that his usefulness and productivity are suffering. Here too, faith should come to one's rescue by providing him with a clear conscience that he has done his best, to the limit of his ability and capacity. The ultimate reward would accrue through God's attribute of 'Raheemiyat' that is Mercy. The reward of man's action lies solely with God, the Ever Merciful and Lord of the Day of Judgement.

We meet challenges daily in our lives and thus cannot escape stress. But, many of us apprehend the outcome of a challenge in the negative sense and overload our personal circuits. It is a common observation that what is work for one, is play for another. What feels like pressure to one person, is stimulation to another. Everyone seems to have his own definition of too much, too little or just enough load. If one remembers that God does not mean to put us under any more burden than we are capable of withstanding and remember also that He alone provides us with strength and moral courage to bear it, then, there should not be any cause for a negative attitude.

One way of overloading one's self is by undertaking not only beyond one's capacity but also trying to put on one's plate more than one can chew. There also is a rat race to keep up with the Joneses. Setting priorities of work and harnessing mental and physical endeavour accordingly, involving one's self in one

specific assignment at a time, even though difficult to practise, is not beyond the scope of human prowess.

I do not think genius as such is born. It is the ability of a man to concentrate and devote unhindered attention to what is most important for him at a specific time, forsaking everything what is peripheral and not central, that, moulds him into the character of a genius.

The behaviour of any human being is the product of his environment, very emphatically, the parental influences and attitudes. A gentleman's son has better chances to be a gentleman. The offspring of a nervous parent is more likely to be ridden with anxiety.

Man is in the habit of judging others with his ill-conceived standards and perceptions, which lend themselves to bias or prejudice. In the matter of ill-will and malice, one who harbours these for others, suffers more than one who happens to be the

target of such feelings. Generosity, magnanimity, charity and chivalry in dealing with others give birth to peace of mind and tranquility.

To sum it all, one's life is God's sacred trust and everyone has a purpose to serve in life. God has created man in His own image. It is for man to explore and try to understand God's attributes. In turn, man should try to reflect in his person, those attributes to the best of his ability and capacity. The best use of man's God given faculties is in the service of humanity. This should inevitably result in tranquility and peace of mind, far removed from stress. To err is human and all of us have our weaknesses, faults and foibles. However, we should get solace in the fact that God is Most Forgiving. The remedy for overcoming stress lies in 'Istighfar' that is, praying to God for forgiveness and for seeking His help in overcoming our weaknesses.

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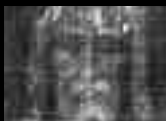
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